

Washington, DC — The Department of Interior FY 2004 bill, which passed yesterday, includes \$1 million for the purchase of critical lands in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, \$300,000 for the Metropolitan Greenspaces Program, and \$1 million for land acquisition in the Sandy River Watershed. The bill also specifies that Columbia River Gorge counties will receive payments to compensate for lost tax revenue due to land acquisition.

Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) played an instrumental role in securing funding for these projects. He testified in front of the House Appropriations Committee to request funding and took the lead on a number of letters from the Oregon delegation in support of these projects. "I can think of no better way to commemorate the bicentennial of the Lewis & Clark expedition than to provide funding to protect the wild and scenic lands they explored," Blumenauer said. "And the county payments will help to bolster local economies in the Gorge."

Martha Bennett, Executive Director of the Columbia River Gorge Commission, said, "The land acquisition program protects valuable Columbia River Gorge lands and compensates property owners in the National Scenic Area. The timing couldn't be better, since the current land acquisition program is due to expire next spring. The Commission is grateful for the Northwest delegation's work to secure this appropriation."

Regarding the \$300,000 included in the bill for the Metropolitan Greenspaces program, Blumenauer said, "The Greenspaces funding is a win for the people and environment of Portland. It will enhance our regional system of natural areas, open spaces, trails, and greenways."

Since 1991, the Metropolitan Greenspaces program has funded 278 locally managed, citizen-driven projects in Portland and Vancouver.

The \$1 million for land acquisition in the Sandy River watershed will preserve critical land in the watershed for fish, wildlife, and recreation. Last year, Portland General Electric (PGE) announced plans to remove its dam on the Sandy River.

"Funding for land acquisition along the Sandy River is a huge conservation opportunity for Oregon," said Blumenauer.